

ISSUE 8

A: Final Preparation

B: Lower Back (Focus Area)

It seems hard to believe but, finally, you are only a few days away from race day. This will likely fill you with a mixture of excitement and dread.

So much of your attention up until now has been on the physical side of the training. At this stage, it is worth remembering that the run will be a psychological and emotional challenge, as well as a physical one. It is important during this time to stay as calm as possible. Your physical preparation is pretty much complete, and now it is time to start thinking about preparing yourself mentally for the day of the run.



Keeping control of your emotions:

Often the most over-riding emotion as you approach your first Marathon is one of anxiety. How will you perform? Will you finish? Will you remember everything?

In the week leading up to the London Marathon it is essential to conserve as much energy as possible (mental as well as physical). To help settle the nerves keep two things in mind.

Firstly, give yourself credit for all the hard work and sacrifice you have put into your preparation up until now. If you have got this far, are hopefully injury free, and have done an amazing job. If you have successfully completed your long runs, your body is prepared.

Secondly, although running the marathon is a huge challenge, it is feasible. And it is feasible for you! Hundreds of 1000s of people from all walks of life have completed the marathon. If they can do it, you can do it.

Plan:

As with many things in life, one of the best ways of keeping your nerves in check is through proper planning and preparation. It always helps to have a **checklist** ready for kit, refreshments and travel plans. If it's written down, it is one less thing to think about.

Another thing to plan for in advance is the registration process. Try and get the registration out of the way early on. This can help for two reasons. Being registered helps make the experience feel more real. It also helps to give you the sense that running a marathon is very much a shared experience, and you are not alone. And registering takes a certain amount of effort. Once it's out of the way, you have more time to conserve energy.

As a reminder, here is the [link](#) for information about the registration process



Be flexible in your approach:

If you have made it this far, you may have started plotting what sort of time you would like to finish the course in. Depending on your personality, you will have either set a rigid goal or a 'nice to have' goal. If you are the sort of person who tends to set challenging goals, I encourage you to be flexible.

It can certainly help to focus the mind if you have a time in mind. However, there are a number of factors (some of which are out of your control) which can affect your performance on the day. One of the single biggest factors is the weather.

It has not been unknown for us to have a mini-heatwave in London in late April. If, on the day, the temperature gets above 20 degrees Celsius, this can have a big impact on your expected time. As an example, we might expect someone targeting a 4 hour marathon to take at least 30 minutes longer in 20 degree heat. And the hotter it gets, the longer the run is likely to take. However, if it turns out to be particularly cold or windy, it can make running more difficult.

Because there are so many variables that can affect your run, it makes sense to set flexible goals. Cut yourself some slack if conditions work against you on the day, and it will allow you to stay focused and motivated. And happy!

What to do in the last week:

Stretch! – Now that you have significantly cut down on your running, use some of your free time to stretch. The stretches the week before the marathon should be fairly long (45-60 seconds), as regular as possible (2 or 3 times a day), and comfortable. But do not push your stretching too hard. Be sure to stretch the following areas; calves, hamstrings, quadriceps, hip flexors, the IT band, lower back, neck and chest.





Eat well – There is a world of advice on nutrition out there. But at this stage, the best advice is to keep it simple. If you have been tempted by carbo-loading, but have never tried it before, it is best not to risk it. You will need a healthy serving of carbs of course.

As a guide, 8-10 grams of carbs per kg of body weight for 2 or 3 days before the run should do the trick. But whatever you do, don't overdo it. You need to increase carbohydrates, but don't gorge on it. Check our earlier newsletter on Marathon Nutrition for more info.

The day before the marathon:

How you prepare yourself on Saturday can have a significant impact on how you run on Sunday. Saturday is all about staying as calm and relaxed as you can, and staying off your feet and resting as much as possible.

If you have adequate time out to rest, use it to visualise your day and visualise your route ahead of time. It is an incredibly worthwhile exercise to have mentally prepared situations ahead of time.



Try to keep your movement to a minimum. Only make the journeys that are absolutely necessary. We strongly advise **not** running at all on this day. But if you are feeling particularly nervous then a short, easy, 20 to 30 minute run may help settle the nerves. But keep in mind that there are no training benefits to be had this close to the event.

One of the most important tips I can give at this stage is not to be tempted to try anything new. The running gear you wear on the day should all have been worn before (especially the trainers), so don't be tempted to purchase something new.

This goes for the food you eat too. Don't experiment with power bars or gels at this stage. Keep the food simple. It is important to stay away from creamy sauces if you eat a pasta dish, and avoid spicy foods. You need your stomach to be settled the day of the run.

Most importantly, don't fantasise about faster finishing times. Even as a novice runner you should have a reasonable idea of what your finishing time might be. If anything, add time to that figure, unrealistic expectations will only set you up for failure.

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Last minute tips for the Big Day:



On the day of the run be sure to give yourself plenty of time for everything. Prior to the run you need to expend as little energy as is humanly possible. Aim to get to the start at least an hour before the race. Before you start the run lubricate any area for which chafing has been a problem. Trust me, chafing during a marathon can be a big distraction.

With the unpredictable nature of London Marathon weather, you will need to find ways to ensure you are as warm and as dry as possible before the race. As you will be setting off early, layers of old t-shirts can help to keep you warm and are easy to dispose of later on. A black bag, with a few small holes cut in (to allow your skin to breathe) is the customary way to shield from the rain. On the off chance that it is a particularly warm day, find as much shelter as you can, prior to and during, the run.

As the run gets underway BE PATIENT. You are among a mass of people and you will be moving slowly for the first half mile to a mile of the marathon. Don't be tempted to try and weave in and out of other runners. It is an unnecessary waste of energy. Be glad for the sedate start. It will act as a gentle warm up and allow your body to start using fat as fuel, which is exactly what you need.

As you get into the heart of the race you will start to feel good. Your body will feel primed and the crowd will be giving you a huge lift. Avoid any temptation to start increasing your pace at this stage. If you want to be brave, save it for the last 3 miles. Going too fast too soon can seriously jeopardise your efforts in your first marathon.

But my biggest tip of all is to take time to soak up the atmosphere. At times during the run you will feel absolutely euphoric. Keep the faith, and keep going. And good luck!



Issue 8: Focus Area – Lower Back

Lower back pain is an extremely common complaint in new runners. Our modern lifestyle often works against us. Too many hours sitting at a computer and so many labour saving devices have taken a toll on our posture. Lower back pain in runners tends to be either muscle-related or joint related.

Muscle Problems

When it comes to your lower back muscles, it's all about core strength, and the coordination of your legs. When you run, your core muscles have to work hard to support your spine and lower back, while your hips, glutes, and hamstrings have to work together to keep you stable. When one muscle or a group of muscles becomes fatigued, your lower back has to work harder to keep you upright and on your feet, which can cause pain or injury.

Anatomy of Sacroiliac Joint

One of the most common lower back complaints is *sacro-iliac* (SI) joint irritation. It can be very debilitating if it affects a recreational runner. The purpose of your SI joints is to provide stability. It connects the bottom of your spine, known as the *sacrum*, to your pelvis. The two SI joints form where the hip bones meet the sacrum.

Sacroiliac Joint Irritation

Symptoms: You may feel pain around the thigh, buttock and lower back. There is often localised swelling and puffiness at the site of the joint itself. The pain becomes noticeable when running uphill, whilst using the stairs, or moving from a sitting to standing position. You may also experience pain or discomfort if you have been sitting for prolonged periods of time.

Cause: There are a variety of possible causes for this condition. Often it is a result of imbalances and postural issues. For example, a difference in leg length or muscle imbalances can set it off. In some instances, poor foot posture will put pressure on the knees that can create weaknesses and fatigue to hamstring and gluteal muscles. Also, excess weight or running on uneven surfaces can have a negative impact.

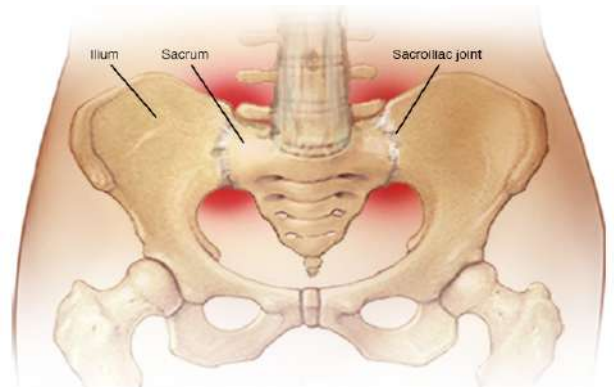
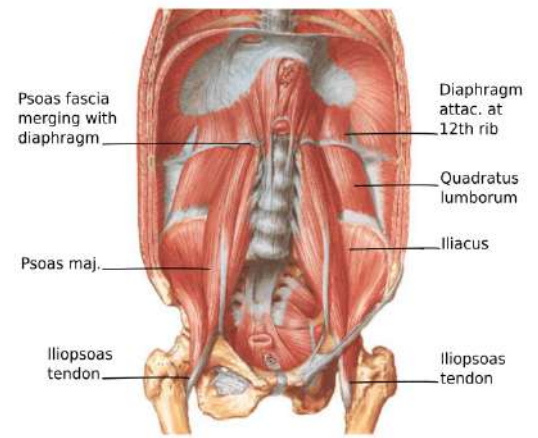
Prevention: Stretching, yoga and exercise can help to improve flexibility and strength in this area. Manual therapies such as osteopathy, physiotherapy and massage, can help to relieve pain and strengthen muscles around the SI joint.

Treatment: Initially you need to rest. If there is inflammation, both anti-inflammatory medication and heat/cold treatment (properly applied) can help. Once the worst of the pain is over, it actually helps to do gentle stretches and exercises. These should be supervised by a professional therapist who can guide you through the proper techniques and principles. If the pain persists, you should see a doctor, as in the worst cases, surgery may be necessary.

Final Word

Completing a marathon is a major achievement. It does however, put the body under a certain amount of stress. It can take up to a month or two for the body to fully rehabilitate afterwards.

It makes sense to give yourself every chance of being fighting fit and healthy at the end of it all. The staff at Perea Clinic would be more than happy to guide you through the proper process of recuperation. This can include appropriate massage, good nutrition and further guided stretches and exercises.



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